

TIMELY AND PERTINENT GOSSIP OF BOOKS AND OF BOOKMEN

TAGORE: THE POET OF INDIA AND HIS MESSAGE

By MONTROSE J. MOSES.

In his own country Rabindranath Tagore, the poet, is regarded as a saint. When he enters a hall to speak crowds of people flock to the street to see him. He is the hero of his country. There are some enthusiastic admirers who, supporting the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, believe his spirit to be that of Christ and turn to his philosophical writings, not as a reflection of Vedanta beliefs, but as the universal reflection of Christianity.

For generations after generations the Tagores have been famous in India. In the realm of affairs, as painters, poets, musicians and as social reformers; but the western world knew little of them until three years ago, when the Nobel prize for the creation of idealistic literature was awarded to this son of an ancient house.

Yet Rabindranath Tagore had been to London before that, and at Oxford had become familiar with the traditions of English poetry sufficiently to add to those traditions a form all his own, which is marked by originality and lucidity of style. He had even ventured to America in order to place his own in an agricultural college and had delivered a series of lectures at Harvard University. These lectures, published in a volume entitled "Sadhana," give his interpretation of the universal spirit of poetry which pervades the world and which is the heart of his belief.

The world in general is just coming to know something of Rabindranath Tagore, though he is 55 years old and has been nearly two decades been at the head and front of the modern movement in India. If that country is to be understood, our civilization will depend on the utterances of this poet and teacher.

A number of years ago when Tagore was in London and the centre of literary admiration, headed by that astute critic Ernest Rhys, he almost prophesied the coming of the present war. In frank words he told his friends that western civilization was going to meet a severe test during which time it would have to give heed to India's message.

He pointed out that the religion of the Tagores was not a superstition, but not all worship of ancestors and idols. We are told that while in London this mystic poet was interested in all things, but the power of creation, of writing, dominated him so long as he was in the midst of his life. From his earliest youth he had been brought up in an atmosphere of contemplation. In the education of every Indian youth there are hours set apart when he is taught to commune with the infinite.

Yet, with this picture of silence in mind, do not think that Tagore is an ascetic, that he does not believe in the world as men and women live it. He is one of the world's workers. He is not nearly one of the world's preachers, but he lives what he preaches.

concerned with the political advancement of his country to such an extent that when he finally withdrew from active participation there was a protest from all sides. But he left politics for his third and final contribution to the India of today. He is an educational reformer, giving practical illustration of his theories by the establishment, with the sanction of his father, of a school at Boipur.

All the Tagores when they have undertaken a thing have become the head and front of their special interest. According to a friend of the family, Mr. Roy, one of them is the greatest musical authority in India, another figure as leader of the Hindu revival of Indian art, with a reputation as a great painter. They have all been wealthy, and so when Tagore was a boy and in later life he was not burdened by anxiety over his material future. When the Nobel prize of \$40,000 was sent him he devoted it to the establishment of a new course in his school. He was not pleased with the notoriety that came with the distinction.

"They have taken away my shelter," he told Mr. Rhys.

In our modern world of feverish progress and of feverish annihilation Tagore's vision is the western hemisphere comes as a symbol of that universal brotherhood about which some of us are speaking as the possible outcome of this war. His own personal life is an illustration of the fact that the saint has to pass through the fire of temptation before he gets to the true meaning of life. As a young man Tagore was a good liver, an esthete in his dress, a romantic poet. But if one reads his poems of love and passion, which are available to us in an English translation that he himself has made, published in a volume called "The Gardener," even there are to be seen the pure depths of that passion out of which, as he grew older and wiser, there came spiritual revelation.

Tagore's Vision of Life.

One day, as he confesses in his "Reminiscences," which should be translated, "a veil was suddenly drawn and everything I saw became luminous. The whole scene was one perfect music, one marvellous rhythm. The houses in the street, the children playing, everything of one luminous whole, inexpressibly glorious. The vision went on for seven or eight days. Every one, even those who were old, seemed to lose their outer barrier of personality, and I was full of gladness, full of love for every person and every tiniest thing. That was one of the first things that gave me the inner vision, and I have tried to explain it in my poems. I have felt ever since that this is my goal—to explain the fulness of life, in its beauty, as perfection."

This same idea finds even clearer expression in another volume, "Gitanjali," or "Song Offerings," done in a free form of poetic prose which suggests the Bible on the one hand and Walt Whitman on the other. You find in this book his belief as to the mission of the poet. You find the highest pitch of devotional love. For Rabindranath Tagore has found his living God in everything around him. The street, the children playing, everything is consecrated to the belief that the divine principle is in all things. Here is his prayer of life:

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.
Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.
Give me the strength never to drown the poor or bend my knee before insolent might.
Give me the strength to raise my mind above the petty and mean.
And give me the strength to find love strength to thy will with love.
And this chant of night is not one where he shows shame for having lived.

His Threelined Work for India.
He has been in the forefront of the religious movement, carrying on the traditions of his father. He has also been



Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet, philosopher and educationist, who is lecturing in New York.

When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.
I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light, and thus am I blessed—let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play, and here have I caught sight of Him that is formless.
My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with His touch who is beyond touch, and if the end comes here, let it come—let this be my parting word.

A Man in Touch With the World.

When we become tempted to say, in the course of our daily traffic, that such writers are not practical in their philosophical point of view, let us not be deceived. Tagore in his fifty-five years has communed much with the infinite, but he has always been a man of affairs. Like Maeterlinck, he gains his strength by contact with the world.

His father once sent his eldest son, Dwijendranath Tagore, to look after one of his country estates, but the young man was a philosopher, and could not keep his mind fixed on the fields and on the labor problems that were imminent. So Rabindranath was sent in his stead and all went well.

This occupation tested the poet's executive powers, brought forth his socialist sympathies with the workers of India, but more than that, it brought him close to the heart of nature. It was this experience, probably, which prompted Tagore to send his own son to America for that scientific training which India most needed.

During all these full years Tagore's literary powers were being fully developed. He was writing novels and short stories. Tagore in his thirties was a man of music, and his English friends have written glowingly of those afternoons in London when he would sing his songs of India for them. He was writing plays and acting in them, for he is more interested in his histrionic abilities. Even now, when one of his plays is to be given at his school, he takes part, and it is said that the most magnificent performance in his "King of the Dark Chamber."

Those who have read "The Post of Love" will acknowledge Tagore to be as poetic a playwright as Maeterlinck in his "The Blue Bird."

"The Death of Tintagel," or as Hauptmann in "Hannele," it is full of the same child love and the same understanding of the child's imaginative nature which permeates his volume of child poems, "The Crescent Moon." He can revitalize Indian mythology, as he did in "Chitra," and give it universal significance. All of this mystic work he can do as a distinctive voice in an age which needs the spiritual man. And he still remains practical, still remains in touch with human affairs as they affect him and women.

A Free Critic of the West.

Tagore has done nothing for the sake of expediency. King George V. knighted him, and he is Sir Rabindranath, but that does not prevent him from criticism. Tagore in his thirties was a man of affairs. Like Maeterlinck, he gains his strength by contact with the world.

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son Davies was also imbued with the ambition to become a painter at one time.

Jack London, before he reached the goal of one of the most popular writers of the day, combined the efforts of half a dozen men in various kinds of work ranging all the way from a tramp to a sea captain. Mary Roberts Rinehart was to be a nurse and gained her intimate knowledge of hospital work in the Pittsburgh School for Nurses. Louise Closser Hale had histrionic aspirations, and her familiarity with stage life is due to the fact that she was an actress before she became a writer.

It was the wish of James Huncker's parents that he should become a priest, and he was educated for one, but instead he became a teacher of the piano and was for ten years connected with the National Conservatory of Music of New York. Margaret Cameron imagined she would devote her life to music before she began to write.

It is not necessarily surprising, but of every given profession former or present school teachers predominate among the popular writers of the day. Among those who have deserted their former work for the more congenial and profitable work of writing are James Lane Allen, who was a public school teacher, and later a professor of Latin in a small college. Parker Filmore was a government teacher in the Philippines. Frances Hodgson Burnett was a country school teacher on a small farm when she began writing stories, and rumor has it that the stamps with which her first contributions were sent away were bought with money obtained from picking her horse. She found a timely and valued friend in Charles J. Peterson of Philadelphia, who paid her liberally for her writing and gave her a chance to get before the public.

Alice Hegan Rice was a teacher in the public schools in Louisville, Ky., when she came into fortune and fame overnight through "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." Kate Douglas Wiggin spent several years trying to establish the first kindergarten school on the Pacific coast before she began to write her charming stories. Eleanor Hoyt Reineck taught in a New York school for girls before she thought of "Belinda."

Maude Radford Warren was teaching in Chicago University, and while downtown one day lost her pocketbook. She found it in a New York City restaurant, and discovered that she was desperately hungry. There was a little beef and—restaurant near by where she could spend 25 cents and still get home without walking. The people in the restaurant differed from those with whom she was familiar in the university atmosphere, and the result was the "Wearing of the Crown," which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Jeanette Lee continues her duties as a member of the faculty of

Smith College and does her writing as a relaxation.

Of course Brander Matthews is still at Columbia. Bliss Perry remains with Harvard, and Henry Seidel Canby is a stationary adjunct to Yale.

William Dean Howells is the dean of newspaper men, who have given up the hurly burly of their youthful days and gone in for the quieter life and more lucrative form of writing. Mr. Howells's first effort outside of his editorial writing on a small Ohio daily newspaper was a campaign life of Lincoln, and so well did he perform his task that the great President sent him to Venice as Consul. Walter Prichard Eaton began as a reporter on the Boston Journal, and then came to New York and did dramatic work for *This Sun* and the *Times*. George Randolph Chester did his first writing as a reporter on the Detroit News, Samuel Hopkins Adams on *This Sun*, and Julian Street worked as a reporter on the New York Evening Mail. Zona Gale did newspaper work in Milwaukee, and Eleanor Gates in San Francisco. Elizabeth Jordan and Olivia Howard Dunbar were on the staff of the New York World, and Fannie Heaslip Lea was until recently a newspaper reporter.

Albert Bigelow Paine edited a department of *St. Nicholas* for ten years before he came out in the open, and Arthur Stansford Pier before he arrived was for years an assistant editor of *Youth's Companion*. Juliet Wilbur Tompkins was for several years an associate editor of *Munsey's*.

WILL THE LITERARY POWER OF WOMEN DEVELOP?

It would appear that the emotional quality in woman is more or less at war with her intellectual aims. Indeed it is sometimes suggested that where woman appears narrowness follows; that books by women are mostly confined to love, are not cosmic in feeling. This is generally true for readers of *Youth's Companion*, a little further on; but it is not true that books where women are the chief characters are narrow. Such books as "Anna Karenina," "Madame Bovary," "The Vicar of Dibley" make that point obvious.

As a rule books about men, touching on the emotional in character, are more political, business, are more powerful than books about women. But one should not forget that books written round women are mostly written by women. As women are far less powerful in literature than men, we must not conclude that books about women are naturally less than books about men. The greatest books about women have been written by men. But few men are suf-



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MANY WRITERS SIDETRACKED FROM OTHER CAREERS

There is perhaps no profession in which the element of chance enters more strongly than that of the writer. It is a slippery road to travel and only a few are sure of even a temporary foothold that may or may not lead them into the realm of the "best sellers."

An interesting phase of those who belong to our so-called literary world of the past and present generation is that few of them started in life with the thought of becoming professional writers. They were trained for other professions or business careers and it was by chance that they discovered their abilities to write a readable tale.

There are those too who fairly blundered into literature and awoke to find themselves famous overnight. A striking instance of this was Edward Eggleston, a successful novelist of a generation ago, who figuratively fell down the stairs into an income of \$10,000 a year. Giving up the life of a Western circuit rider he came to New York to become the editor of *Heart and Home*. A regular writer of that periodical failed on one occasion to forward a story and Mr. Eggleston volunteered to "fill in." He wrote his experiences as a wandering Methodist minister in Indiana. The story struck a popular chord and his readers wanted more. To supply the demand he wrote "The Circuit Rider," "The Hoosier Schoolmaster" and other popular stories that are still on the book shelves.

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The same element of chance holds good with our present-day writers and poets. Nearly all of them have been diverted from the paths of their chosen life work. It was never intended, for instance, by those who had them in chance when they were youngsters that Thomas Nelson Page or John Kendrick Bangs should write novels or humorous stuff. They had been trained for the law and the Supreme Court was their natural goal. Neither was it intended that Richard Washburn Child, James Hopper, John Luther Long or Owen Wister should be novelists. Some sort of a Federal judgeship was the least expected of them, as was Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's efforts in producing "Gates Ajar." It took her two years to write the story and two more years to find a publisher.

Joel Chandler Harris of "Uncle Remus" fame said it was purely chance that he became a writer. Born and reared in the South, he had heard from plantation "uncles" and "aunts" the myths and stories he later made such good use of. He had not intended to write the value of the material he had unconsciously absorbed only when he read an article in the old *Lippincott's* on negro folk-lore.

The world of art may possibly have lost a modern Michael Angelo in Robert W. Chambers. The novel reading world, however, gained an interesting story teller when he gave up his art studies after several years in Paris. Marie Thomp-

Lining Up for Greatest Labor Fight in History

On one side, are the railroads of the United States representing a capitalization of twenty billions of dollars, and employing more than one and a half million persons, combined to fight the Adamson Law by injunction. They are supported by a new eight billion dollar organization of business men, called the National Industrial Conference Board, who give employment to nearly seven million persons. On the other side, are four hundred thousand members of four great Brotherhoods, backed by nearly four hundred thousand other workers and by two million members of the American Federation of Labor.

With such an alignment there are ominous possibilities of a tremendous labor war this winter.

The railroad companies, according to one of their official spokesmen, "are agreed to fight to the end," against the enforcement of the Adamson law, while Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, says warningly "You throw down the gauntlet and we accept the challenge. When the time comes it will be another case of 'Lay on Macduff and damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold, enough.'"

In THE LITERARY DIGEST for December 2d, the leading article presents this subject from all angles, not forgetting the part that the public is bound to experience.

There are other feature articles covering important problems now in the public mind, among which are:

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